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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1600
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1524
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 0678
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PTER](#) [SNAR](#) [ASEC](#) [KCRM](#) [IN](#) [BG](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: MEGHALAYA STATE POLICE SEIZE 5 KILOS OF HEROIN

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On July 6 in Northeast India, Meghalaya state police reportedly recovered 5 kilograms of heroin in the state capital Shillong. Two persons have been arrested in connection with the seizure. One suspect is an Indian federal government employee, the other is Moulvi (Muslim preacher); both are from the small Pangal Muslim community in the state of Manipur. Local authorities are increasingly concerned about the illicit activities of Pangal youths and the possible links to terrorism. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Two alleged drug traffickers were arrested on July 6 in Shillong, the capital of India's Northeastern Meghalaya state. Media, quoting officials from Meghalaya's Criminal Investigation Department (CID), reported that a special anti-drug task force recovered 5 kilograms of heroin, worth USD 2.5 million. This is the biggest single drug seizure made by the task force in the state. The two suspects were arrested under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Prevention) Act [NDPS Act].

¶3. (SBU) A senior Meghalaya police officer confirmed to ECON FSN media reports about the volume of the drug seized and its market value. Although the arrests were made in Shillong, the two arrested -- Mohammed Sikander, alias Muzzafar Ali (36) and Mohammed Naimuddin (33) -- are natives of neighboring Manipur, an Indian border state with Burma, known for its thriving illicit drug trade. Meghalaya has no international border with Burma but shares a long border with Bangladesh. CID officials told post that Sikandar was working as an assistant storekeeper with the Geological Survey of India in Shillong.

¶4. (SBU) The senior police officer also expressed concern about the security implications of the case as both Naimuddin and Sikander are Pangals, a Muslim community of approximately 50,000 people indigenous to Manipur. Contacts in the Manipur police confirmed many Pangal youths are involved in drug- and gun-running rackets, extortion and other illegal activities. Much of the illicit activity is conducted by the Pangal insurgent group, Peoples United Liberation Front (PULF). Post contacts in Manipur expressed concern about increasing involvement of Pangals in drug trafficking and about the

potential links to terrorist activity. On December 19, 2006, New Delhi Police arrested three Pangal youths, Salman Khurshid Kori (23), Abdul Rehman (24) and Mohammad Akbar Hussain (20), when they exited a bus from Jammu in New Delhi's Red Fort area. The police alleged that the three were Laskhar-e-Taiba (LeT) members and were carrying two kilograms of RDX, two detonators and one hand grenade.

15. (SBU) Inadequate equipment is a constraint for law enforcing agencies fighting drug trafficking in Meghalaya. A senior CID official told post that the Meghalaya government has recently submitted a request to the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) in New Delhi for essential equipment to combat drug trafficking. CID's wish list includes vehicles, computers, and surveillance and communication equipment. In 2001, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) extended similar assistance to police in the nearby Northeast Indian state of Mizoram.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: Northeast India is a major center for trade of illicit drugs. Many of the region's ethnic insurgencies are financed by drug and weapon smuggling. However, this recent arrest is of greater concern to the Meghalaya police given the quantity of heroin seized and the detainees' connection with the Muslim Pangal community.
JARDINE